

# Levels of Collaboration: *Where Does Your Work Fit In?*

by Betty (Elizabeth) L. Marcoux

Action in library media centers today often involves collaboration with the classroom and the administration, as well as links to learning standards. Smith spoke about the need to have a collaborative environment in a school to positively affect instruction (1990). There is also significant research that speaks to the benefits of collaboration. A study in Colorado suggests there is evidence that student achievement is 20% higher in schools where there is collaboration compared to schools where there isn't collaboration (Lance 2000).

## **Collaboration and Academic Concerns**

Several academic areas of concern are enhanced by collaboration. They are the following:

### **Student achievement**

An increase in student achievement in collaborative settings has been established in studies such as Judith Warren Little's in 1990 where she found that collaboration between teachers was directly linked to student achievement. More recently, a study of collaboration indicated that test scores were directly impacted in relationship to the degree to which library media specialists and classroom teachers worked together (Lance 2003). This study also indicated that collaboration between teachers and library media specialists is more likely when the library media specialist is a school leader.

### **Teacher professional development**

An article by Vi Harada discussed the challenges of teacher collaboration (2001). She suggested that there are concepts on collaboration that can be implemented and documented in ways that allow them to impact teacher evaluation and create an en-

vironment of shared teaching values with a positive impact on student learning. In the state of Washington there is a push to place the library media center in the middle of teacher learning about the classroom-based assessments in social studies (<http://www.wlma.org/cbas>). Several summer institute programs that instruct about the collaboration between the social studies classroom teacher and the library media specialist are being held throughout the state and are being taught by library media specialists to classroom teachers. This is an example of the opportunities available to library media specialists to interact more concertedly with classroom teachers for the purpose of increasing student achievement through collaboration.

### **Collaborative schools**

Collaborative schools are valued and sought after in teaching environments (Leonard and Leonard 2003). While there may be frequent evaluation and feedback, it is usually informal and thus the opportunity to be an impromptu mentor to other teachers is more likely and less threatening. Teachers practicing communication skills with other teachers tend to be more likely to collaborate, and this is one of the factors in the current No Child Left Behind professional teacher

---

Betty (Elizabeth) L. Marcoux, Ph.D., currently is on the faculty of the University of Washington Information School, and teaches in the area of school and youth librarianship. Formerly a K-12 teacher and library media specialist, she now works with current and future practitioners who dedicate themselves to children and young adult information.



standard requirements (<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html>). Teachers are viewed as part of a community (the school) of learners who engage in a learning process more actively when there are elements of cooperative learning and development. Empowering students is valued by teachers as it allows them to have input into what impacts students and their work. Novice teachers also benefit from being empowered as it gives them a sense of supportive mentoring where mistakes and inadequacies are not judged but used to launch into alternative and perhaps better teaching methodology. Novice teachers maximize their rewards through elements of peer collaboration that allow them to seek advice and guidance as well as assistance—resulting in better teacher and learning.

#### **Educational improvement**

Collaboration means a shared event or experience. In schools this can be translated to mean jointly contributing to the belief that school quality is largely based upon what happens at the site. A book written in 1998 by Sarasen and Lorentz spoke about the need to institutionalize a level of collaboration in the school for educational improvement. Instruction was seen as most effective in a school environment that had norms of collegiality and continuous improvement. A wide range of practices and structures enabled educators to work together and move toward educational improvement.

#### **Collaboration Characteristics**

There are a variety of characteristics that define collaboration behav-

iors between educators. Significant ones are the following:

#### **Frequent, continuous conversation about teaching and its practice**

The ability to have peer conversations about what will work, won't work, could work better, etc. pedagogically increases the awareness of involved parties about what is best for student learning in that situation. Sharing information about the learners helps with the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a learning experience. Collaborative methodology allows for this to happen.

**“Collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own” (Fullen 1993).**

#### **Frequent use of peer observation and critique of teaching**

Peer assessment is a threatening behavior, but one that can potentially be of great benefit to both the assessor and the assessee. A library media center can be a strong venue for such observation and critique and can lead to more concerted and stronger collaboration between the teacher and the library media specialist. Knowing the hazards as well as the opportunities of a learning situation helps to give insights not only to those

with daily connections, but builds respect and understanding for what is occurring as well as what might occur. Sharing this information in a nonthreatening environment helps everyone develop and fine-tune their educational approaches.

#### **Joint planning, design, research, evaluation, instruction preparation**

There is evidence in the research that the use of communication between information agencies who share common audiences and goals is more effective in designing meaningful learning opportunities. In the state of Washington, the Connecting Learners to Libraries Initiative asked school and public libraries serving the same student populations to develop and implement coordinated projects between their agencies (Washington State Library 2007). The results suggest that awareness of each other's environment as well as the joint planning and design of their work benefited the students at both sites.

#### **Peer coaching**

A recent study by Meyers, Fisher, Marcoux with tweens (those between the ages of 9-13) found that while they benefited from a consistent message, they were often more successful sharing the message with their peers than were the adults (2007). This suggests that peer coaching may have more value to the peer than adult coaching in some circumstances, and that having student assistants work with each other as well as other students may have more learning value to them than previously understood. Specifically, increasing these interactions may have value.



## Ingredients of Successful Collaboration

There are six elements of successful collaboration: the environment, the characteristics of mentoring, the process or structure of collaboration, communication, a shared purpose, and resources. Each element has an analysis that determines the level of collaboration. For instance, resources can be a reactive set of reading materials, office tools, writing tools—all minimal in terms of facilitation—to a maximum of a discussion about the resource types needed and how to best use them for that purpose. The environment may be minimally the four walls of the classroom or maximally the classroom expanded to include the entire learning environment appropriate to the lesson.

There are five different levels of collaboration. Each lesson can be analyzed to determine the level of collaboration it encompasses: consumption, connection, cooperation, coordination, ultimate collaboration. This, of course, is NOT taking into consideration the level of isolation, the antithesis of collaboration—something experienced in schools where there is no connection between the library media center and the classroom.

Definitions for these types of collaboration are as follows:

**Consumption:** Students consume library resources for typing, printing, photocopying, weekly reading quotas, etc.

**Connection:** The library staff is informed about the lesson in terms of what it is and/or when it will occur in the library media center but has no input into the design or timing of it.

**Cooperation:** The library staff is informed about the lesson goals, its expected outcome, its due

date, and the criteria for assessment. There is minimal consultation about types of resources to be used and timing of the project. The library staff works with the students on how to use the resources and how to do their research.

**Coordination:** The library staff has informed the library media center about the lesson goals, its expected outcome, the timing of the project, and how it will be evaluated. The library staff has shown students not only how to use the resources but has participated in facilitating their use. The library staff has worked with the students on how to do their research and how to develop their projects.

**Collaboration (Ultimate):** The library staff and the classroom teacher have jointly planned and implemented the entire lesson. Teaching is shared on all aspects of the lesson, and student assessment/evaluation is done jointly. There is evaluation of both content mastery and also resource use. Students are also assessed on their information literacy process.

Fullen pointed out the successful connection of a learning organization with its ability to form and reform alliances that have similar agendas (1993, 97). He advocated for sharing information. He believed that being dependent on sharing created an outcome that contributed to higher [learning] standards. Malone looked at collaboration from a business lens, but also talked about the flow dependency of one activity leading to the production of another resource or activity which came about only because of this interaction (2004).

## A Movable Feat

It is possible to move up the collaboration continuum to a higher level or degree of collaboration. It is also important to know that not all lessons need or should be at the “ultimate collaboration” level. Assess the level needed for the particular library media program. Determine which lessons have potential for moving to a higher level of collaboration. Determine how to get there.

When assessing the level of collaboration, consider how this lesson could move up the collaboration pyramid and become part of the post-project/lesson assessment. In designing the lesson for the “next” time, these are the issues that will be taken into consideration by both the library media specialist and the classroom teacher. A record of the event(s) with documentation of what has occurred will assist both to develop a closer style of collaboration and increase the visibility of the work both are doing.

## Is This You?

There are two streams of thought in terms of collaboration: proactive and reactive. The differences are sug-

Diagram 1

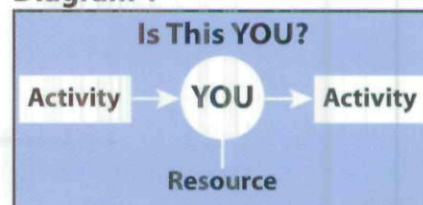
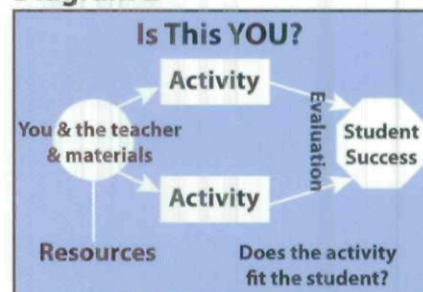


Diagram 2





gested in Diagram 1. In this diagram, “you” are focused upon the activity and responding to it. This is a reactive stance and common in school library media programs. Few connections are made between students learning other than to suggest support for what someone else has put in place to create the learning opportunity.

Diagram 2 suggests a more active stance. It suggests that “you” are a part of the planning, implementing, and ultimately the evaluation of the learning event. It even suggests evaluation of the actual activity to see how well it matches/fits the student learning objective.

### Pyramid of Collaboration

A Pyramid of Collaboration (see below) of the various levels of collaboration and a Collaboration Assessment Tool (see page 24) will allow you to determine what level best fits the work being done. Used in determining best practices between collaborating factors of the public and school libraries, and also used in various Washington state site schools to increase collaboration, this instrument is offered for your use. Please inform the creator of this instrument as to its use and value to your program.

The most important part of the collaboration equation is YOU! Work on identifying the issues that help

or hinder collaboration. Identify the major stakeholders needed to do collaboration. Do an assessment of what is happening now. Then, examine various options that match with the assessment findings. When you have this information, consider holding focus meetings to confirm findings and plans. Once that has happened, do it and evaluate what you do. Remember, in the end, the effort needed for collaboration must result in enough reward so that there is reason for all involved to continue to support the process.

### Conclusion

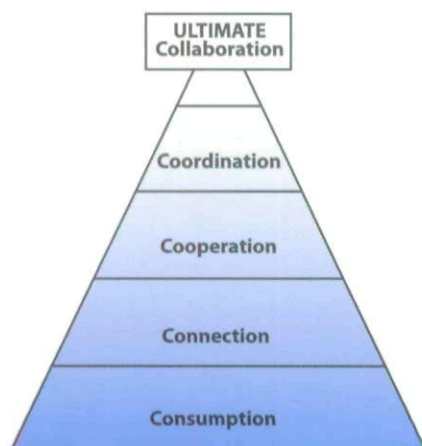
To collaborate is to share—to collaborate at different levels is to share the responsibility for learning with more and more input. While there are other ways of approaching collaboration, this model allows for greater collaboration between the classroom and the library media center. It involves the school library staff interacting with the teaching staff. It is moving from information literacy expertise to information process expertise. The move means working with the classroom teacher as much as students. It means facilitating the Internet and database use as guided research tools full of resources. The focus of the school library staff is from that of the knowledge holder to the knowledge manager.

The newer model of collaboration involves working with others to determine the social costs and implications of information to the student learning environment. It means considering social perceptions of the audience, relationships between the instruction and the learning, developmental challenges, and greater understanding of how to best devise (and evaluate) learning opportunities that achieve the target more readily.

According to the study by Meyers, Fisher, and Marcoux, there is a richness in providing for information seeking practices that resonate clearly with students if these practices are socially and developmentally mediated and facilitated (2007). The library media specialist can effectively work in these areas of differentiated learning. Collaboration makes this happen more frequently.

### References:

- Fullen, M. *The Learning Organization and its Environment: In Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*. Falmer Press, 1993.
- Harada, Violet H. “Professional Development as Collaborative Inquiry.” *Knowledge Quest* 29, no. 4 (March/April 2001): 13-19.
- Leonard, L., and P. Leonard. “The Continuing Trouble with Collaboration: Teachers Talk.” *Current Issues in Education* [On-line] 6, no. 15 (September 17, 2003). <http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume6/number15/>
- Lance, K. Curry. “How School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards.” *Library Research Services* (April 2000). <http://www.lrs.org/documents/lmcstudies/CO/execsumm.pdf>
- Little, J. W. “The Persistence of Privacy: Autonomy and Initiative in Teachers’ Relations.” *Teachers College Record* 91, no. 4 (April 1990): 509-536.
- Malone, T. *The Future of Work: How the New Order of Business Will Shape Your Organization, Your Management style, and Your Life*. Harvard Business Press, 2004.
- Meyers, E. et al. *Social in-Social out: The Information Worlds of Millenials*. In press, 2007.
- No Child Left Behind. *Executive Summary*. 2001. <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html>
- Sarason, S. B., and E. M. Lorentz. *Crossing Boundaries: Collaboration, Coordination, and the Redefinition of Resources*. ERIC ED412660, 1998.
- Smith, S. C., and J. J. Scott. *The Collaborative School: A Work Environment for Effective Instruction*. Eric SuDoc ED 1.310/2:316918, 1990.
- Washington State Library. *Connecting Learners to Libraries Initiative*. 2007. <http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/libraries/projects/connecting/>





COLLABORATION ASSESSMENT TOOL						
TYPE	Environment	Mentoring Characteristics	Process and Structure	Communication	Purpose	Resources
Isolation	No known connection with school agenda	No connection with other instructors	Used as prep time and/or weekly circulation	No known interaction between library media center and school community	Ancillary/isolated to school agenda	No known interaction for resource selection/use by learners
Consumption	Used as extension to classroom for space purposes only	Informal/formal mentoring structures nonexistent	Reactive and without notice	Only at the time of the use of the library media center or shortly before arriving—not about partnership but about use of facility and resources	Classroom goal, not shared	Minimal and mainly for tool use
Connection	Used as classroom extension for continuing research from classroom	Library media specialist used to support teacher-driven lesson; mentoring is only one way—teacher will assess if resources from library media center are valuable to students	Directive and one way; library media specialist reinforcing assignment given and directed by teacher	Teacher-driven; library media specialist in supportive position of teacher directions	Reinforcement of teacher assignment	Use of some research tools, reading collection; not universal presentation of process to students
Cooperation	Open facility that welcomes student use; extension of assignment rather than classroom	Shared assessment of student use of library media center; some dialogue about successes and failures of student research work	Shared goals to create opportunities for students to interact with resources	Teacher initiated, timing agreed upon by all parties and relational to assignment	Can be learning standard or district goal but not necessarily totally connected	Types of resources to be used discussed first with teacher then students
Coordination	Library media center seen as integral to the successful accomplishment of project	Significant coordination regarding timing of resource use, shared responsibility for successful resource use and this becomes emphasis of mentoring relationship	Planning time to meet in partnership found; much prepared in terms of who will do what part but no overlap at this time; school library staff aware of evaluation criteria	Mainly still teacher-driven with library media specialist input into process and planning of project; benchmarks and evaluation techniques discussed	Usually significant connection to state mandate/standard or school priority	Suggestions of resources and resource use patterns explored and decided upon jointly; partnership in terms of presentation of this component of research as well as research process
Ultimate Collaboration	Information facilitated by the library media program and professional is completely integral to the total project/lesson	Complete coordination regarding resource use timing, usage, facilitation—all three mentored by both the classroom and library professionals.	Planning time for design and evaluation considered essential to the success of the project and is factored into the overall project idea	Communication is between the classroom and library media center as well as the involved departments and administration; benchmarks are for project progress and evaluation, and are shared and used by all	Every part of the project referenced to state standards or school priorities with complete explanations	All resources support the project and process, and are considered as supportive to the project's objective(s); total agreement about the use of these resources and for seamless support/facilitation of the research needed

Copyright of *School Library Media Activities Monthly* is the property of Greenwood Publishing Group Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.